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ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON ITS FIRST SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

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Chapter ___

ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

1. The Commission considered item 4 of its agenda at its 7th to 10th meetings, on 15 and 16 April 1993. It had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Secretary-General on ways and means of improving the quality of coordination and cooperation in science and technology for development (E/CN.16/1993/3);

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on the assessment of the effect of activities of the United Nations system related to the process of creating and strengthening endogenous capacity-building in science and technology in developing countries (E/CN.16/1993/4);

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Department of Economic and Social Development in science and technology for development (E/CN.16/1993/5);

(d) Report of the Meeting of High-level Experts on Science and Technology for Development (E/CN.16/1993/6);

(e) Note by the Secretariat on the Expert Group Meeting on Technology Assessment, Monitoring and Forecasting (E/CN.16/1993/CRP.1).

2. In introducing item 4, the Director of the Division of Science, Technology, Environment, Energy and Natural Resources of the Department of Economic and Social Development conveyed the commitment of the Secretary-General to enhancing the unity of purpose, coordination, cooperation and complementarity of the United Nations in the economic, social and environmental fields at both the policy and the operational levels. She emphasized the importance of harmonization of science and technology policies through an integrated approach, stressed the need for the United Nations to coordinate its efforts to offer practical assistance at the country level and emphasized endogenous capacity-building as the key to sustainable development. She noted the main features of the pilot programme on endogenous capacity-building currently undertaken by the Department. She also referred to other recent activities of the Department in the field of science and technology, such as technology assessment, conversion of military technologies to civilian use, and science and technology for the least developed countries. She stated that the current restructuring at the United Nations was expected to further enhance its programme on science and technology.

A. Coordination and cooperation in science and technology within the United Nations system

3. The following main points were made during the discussion. The objective of system-wide coordination in science and technology should be to create synergy. While resources fell short of the requirements of developing countries and since many agencies were involved in science and technology, better coordination was needed from the planning and programming stage, especially at the regional and country programme levels.

4. Concern was raised about the proposal to abolish the ACC Task Force on Science and Technology for Development, which has done valuable work. In case it was to be abolished, there was a need to find alternative mechanisms and to foster coordination between the Commission and the agencies. it was suggested that periodic reports be submitted to the Commission by the agencies at each session, a well as information on results of coordinated programmes. That would give members of the Commission an orientation and knowledge about international and inter-agency coordination. It was important for the Commission to act as a synergistic focal point to integrate and orchestrate the efforts carried out by individual agencies and to provide concrete suggestions on that basis to the Economic and Social Council.

5. The Commission should take advantage of its proximity to the Council to make policy recommendations through it to the General Assembly. While the Council was in charge of overall coordination within the United Nations system, the Commission had a role to provide advice on coordination in science and technology, which could form a part of the high-level segment of the Council in 1994. The Commission would be most effective by obtaining regular feedback from its parent body, the Council, and by empowering its bureau with the ability to take action between Commission sessions.

6. System-wide coordination must take into account national or regional priorities and needs, based on the known principle of "Think globally, act locally". Inadequate communication had led to certain duplication of activities, which could be remedied by the creation of an information network as a means of information exchange and dissemination within the United Nations system and to facilitate access by national users. The creation of databases on current science and technology projects, national science and technology policies and global priorities should be an important element of the network. Emphasis should be placed on the use of floppy disks instead of in-print "on-line" communication such as E-mail.

7. With regard to the relationship with the Commission on Sustainable Development, the present Commission should be the substantive body for science and technology and provide expert advice for discussion on sustainable development.

8. The active participation of non-governmental organizations in the current session was welcomed. The Commission should find ways of interfacing with such organizations, which were critical in the coordination process.

B. Assessment of the effect of activities of the United Nations system related to the process of creating and strengthening endogenous capacity-building in science and technology in developing countries

9. The concept of endogenous capacity-building was perceived as central to development cooperation in science and technology. Endogenous capacity-building required the full and active participation of all sectors of society, especially the productive, including the private, sector. The stakeholders' policy dialogues formed a critical part of the exercise and could harness broad-based national consensus on how and where to apply technology. The operational activities with regard to endogenous capacity-building might also differ significantly from country to country, depending on the size and economic, social and cultural context of the country. Endogenous capacity-building should also not be considered in isolation but in relation to specific sectors such as human resources development, environmentally sound technology and foreign direct investment.

10. The social, economic and cultural dimensions of science and technology development, especially macroeconomic policies and regulatory environment, constituted a critical aspect of endogenous capacity-building for both developing countries and economies in transition.

11. It was suggested that a comprehensive programme on endogenous capacity-building relevant to Agenda 21 be developed which could help in achieving the objective of making the transition to environmentally sustainable technologies. The Commission should take upon itself the task of developing and leading such a programme.

12. Commenting on the current pilot programme on endogenous capacity-building being undertaken by the Science and Technology Branch of the Department of Economic and Social Development, representatives commended the underlying

concepts, methodologies and approach that emphasized de facto national execution under the leadership of a National Steering Committee consisting of representative stakeholders drawn from among policy makers, industries, the private sector, the science and technology community and financial and educational institutions. The programme has led to the engagement of local expertise to undertake several critical diagnostic and substantive studies, long neglected in many countries, designed to build a nexus between resources, demand and technology. That proved very useful in building local expertise.

13. In some countries, the endogenous capacity-building programme created an extensive awareness among policy makers and end-users of technologies and helped define priorities aiming at a sustainable course of development through the application of technology and the rational use of resources.

14. The endogenous capacity programme has led to initiatives in human resources development, new legislation and institutional development. It had already impacted on the domestic decision-making process, and hastened the integration of science and technology with macroeconomic policies and developed a portfolio of priority projects. The national policy dialogues under the pilot programme had contributed to the formulation of national technology policies in some countries.

15. It was also noted that without the minimum infrastructure and institutional set-up provided through international assistance, it was difficult to organize endogenous capacity-building activities, particularly in the least developed countries. It was emphasized that endogenous capacity-building should become a key area in the work of the Commission. The programme would need to be integrated with sustainable development and made applicable to other countries, including economies in transition.

C. Activities of the Department of Economic and Social Development in science and technology for development

16. The Commission considered that careful note should be taken of the experience gained by the former Advisory Committee on Science and Technology for Development concerning the future modalities and functioning of the Commission, as well as the role of its secretariat, which should be neutral and not be involved in operational activities. The secretariat should address the entire range of activities within the United Nations system in the field of science and technology and should cooperate both with the private sector and with Governments. One of its functions could be to synergize activities within the system and to serve as the focal point to analyse trends and forecasts. It could also bring to the attention of the Commission science and technology policies of countries and activities of organizations, including the regional commissions.

17. Having reviewed with appreciation the activities conducted by the Department of Economic and Social Development on the subject of conversion of military technology to civilian use, the Commission called upon the General Assembly to consider the subject. Experiences were shared in redirecting resources and skills from defence industries to those with civilian application,

which could be a force for economic development for both countries in transition and many developing countries.

18. With regard to the harmonization of science and technology within the United Nations system, the secretariat should help the Commission in preparing high quality documents, inter alia, on the priority themes chosen for consideration at its subsequent sessions. The Commission should give careful thought to the nature of its output, drawing upon examples such as the World Development Report of the World Bank, the Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the work of the Committee on Development Planning.

19. Several United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations expressed their views on the topic of coordination and their prospective inputs to the work of the new Commission.

20. The representative of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) stated that the structural changes that the world was currently experiencing had technology at their root. Developing countries should give greater attention to those policies that foster development, adoption and adaptation of technology in order to take advantage of new opportunities in the process of change. The capability of enterprises to establish information linkages with other economic agents and research institutions would be a principal factor in that context. The work of UNCTAD strived to strengthen the substantive support to intergovernmental bodies, and to the new Commission in particular, ultimately benefiting developing countries and countries in transition.

21. The representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) expressed the continued need for system-wide cooperation in identifying common areas of interest, as well as joint planning and programming. Several UNESCO programmes currently under implementation, such as that entitled "Science, technology and society", aimed at raising public awareness of the opportunities offered by science and technology. Reference was also made to the United Nations expert group meeting on technology assessment, monitoring and forecasting, held in Paris in January 1993, which was jointly organized by UNESCO and the Department of Economic and Social Development and brought together many United Nations agencies in addition to individual experts.

22. The representative of ILO remarked that his organization - together with other members of the United Nations system - had contributed to endogenous capacity-building in developing countries, stressing the importance of identifying in each national context the factors that influenced that process. He emphasized that countries might be forced to make choices either between immediate (though smaller) increases in output and employment, or longer-term (larger) increases, but with future gains in both output and employment. The latter would be more relevant in the context of achieving sustainable development.

23. The representative of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) noted that endogenous capacity-building required a close interrelationship with the productive sector. To be effective, capacity-building should be sustained and sustainable over longer periods of time,

involving a systems approach and linked with the productive sector and technology management. Coordination did not mean merely avoidance of duplication, but should rather lead to synergy of system-wide activities.

24. The representative of the United Nations University (UNU) indicated that UNU has been engaged in research, advanced training and the dissemination of knowledge in selected areas. UNU has established research and training centres such as the International Institute for New Technologies in the Netherlands and the International Institute for Software Technology in Macau, as well as a network of centres of excellence in the area of new and renewable sources of energy.

25. The representative of the Office for Outer Space Affairs focused on the immense potential of space technology, emphasizing the importance of Earth satellite observation and communications. Regional centres for space science and technology education were now established at major national science and technology-oriented universities and research institutes. Developing countries were in urgent need of better access to technological literature and information.

26. The representative of a non-governmental organization, the International Association of Impact Assessment (IAIA), outlined the connections between the work of his organization and United Nations activities in technology assessment and in the context of the Rio agreements.

27. In summarizing the discussion on item 4, the Chairman noted that the Commission was of the view that system-wide coordination in the field of science and technology was required more than ever in the context of the increasing role of science and technology in economic and social development, and to operationalize and implement the concept of sustainable development. Special priority should be assigned to enhancing the complementarity of all components of the system in such areas as capacity-building and information management; development, transfer and application of environmentally sound technologies; technology assessment and forecasting; and conversion of military technologies to civilian use. Recognizing that coordination was a complex process, the importance of coherence and harmonized national policies in the area of science and technology was underscored, as well as the need for Governments to articulate such harmonized policies consistently throughout the system.

28. One of the most important roles of the Commission was to assist the Economic and Social Council in carrying out coordination of the science and technology activities of the United Nations system at the global level. An effective coordination mechanism needed to be maintained in the area of science and technology within the restructured framework of the Administrative Committee on Coordination. The Commission should interact closely with relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and take full advantage of their experience. While Secretariat arrangements and organizational set-up are the prerogatives of the Secretary-General, the need for strong and effective Secretariat support for the work of the Commission was stressed.

29. There was a broad consensus on the crucial importance of endogenous capacity-building, exemplified by the pilot programme undertaken by the Department of Economic and Social Development. Identification of priorities in

science and technology through stakeholders' policy dialogues might provide a useful framework for sustainable development to integrate science and technology into the mainstream of socio-economic development. Over time, the process of participatory priority-setting through policy dialogues should be built into domestic decision-making. The Commission should maintain the topic of endogenous capacity-building in its future work programme and formulate similar programmes to implement the science and technology issues of Agenda 21.